

Senior Health News

Depression In The Elderly Is Treatable

(NAPS)—Depression is not a normal part of aging, according to research supported by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Warning signals family and friends should look for include chronic sleep problems and inability to rest, excessive worrying, increasing dependency, withdrawal from friends, hypochondria and complaints of chronic aches or pains that cannot be attributed to other disorders.

“Family members are the key in getting elders into treatment, because too often elders don’t recognize depression in themselves,” points out Dr. Charles Reynolds, director of the Late Life Depression Clinic at the University of Pittsburgh, one of three Intervention Research Centers supported by NIMH. In addition, he said, many senior citizens will not discuss mental health problems with their doctors because they don’t want the term “depression” associated with them.

With clinical depression in the elderly comes a far more serious threat—suicide. The highest rates of suicide are among the elderly, particularly white men ages 80 to 85, says Dr. Reynolds. Getting the proper treatment for a depressed elder is vital to prevent depression from getting worse. Yet only one in six elders with clinical depression gets diagnosed and treated for the illness, according to an updated NIH consensus development statement.



For a free brochure about depression and its treatment call NIMH at 1-800-421-4211.

The steps to handling depression are easy to remember for both seniors and their loved ones:

- Recognize that depression is not a normal part of aging, and take symptoms seriously.
- Seek information from individuals and organizations experienced in helping the elderly.
- Mobilize social support from relatives and friends.
- Most importantly, get treated promptly.

Free brochures on depression and its treatment are available by calling NIMH at 1-800-421-4211 or on the Internet at www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/depoldermenu.cfm.

A pamphlet on depression by NIH’s National Institute on Aging is also online at www.nih.gov/nia/health/agepages/depresti.htm.